

CORONATION SPECIAL

Exploring Judaism series

KINGLY BEGINNINGS

Deuteronomy 17:14-20ⁱ

כִּי־תָבֹא אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן
לְךָ וִירָשְׁתָּהּ וַיִּשְׁבְּתָהּ בָּהּ וְאַמְרַתְּ אֲשִׁמָּה
עָלַי מֶלֶךְ בְּכָל־הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר סְבִיבֹתַי: שׁוּם
תַּשִּׁים עָלֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בּוֹ
מִקֶּרֶב אַחֶיךָ תַּשִּׁים עָלֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ לֹא תֹכֵל
לִתֵּת עָלֶיךָ אִישׁ נָכְרִי אֲשֶׁר לֹא־אַחֶיךָ הוּא:
רַק לֹא־יִרְבֶּה־לוֹ סוּסִים וְלֹא־יָשִׁיב אֶת־הָעָם
מִצְרָיִמָּה לְמַעַן הִרְבוֹת סוּס וַיְהוֶה אָמַר לָכֶם
לֹא תִסָּפּוּן לָשׁוּב בַּדֶּרֶךְ הַזֶּה עוֹד: וְלֹא יִרְבֶּה־
לוֹ נָשִׁים וְלֹא יִסּוּר לָבָבוֹ וְכֶסֶף וְזָהָב לֹא
יִרְבֶּה־לוֹ מְאֹד: וְהָיָה כְּשִׁבְתּוֹ עַל כִּסֵּא
מַמְלָכְתּוֹ וְכָתַב לוֹ אֶת־מִשְׁנֵה הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת
עַל־סֵפֶר מִלִּפְנֵי הַכֹּהֲנִים הַלְוִיִּם: וְהָיְתָה עִמּוֹ
וְקָרָא בּוֹ כָּל־יְמֵי חַיָּיו לְמַעַן יִלְמַד לִירְאָה
אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהָיו לְשֹׁמֵר אֶת־כָּל־דִּבְרֵי
הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת וְאֶת־הַחֻקִּים הָאֵלֶּה לַעֲשׂוֹתָם:
לִבְלֹתִי רוּם־לָבָבוֹ מֵאַחֶיו וּלְבַלְתִּי סוּר מִן־
הַמִּצְוָה יְמִין וּשְׂמָאוֹל לְמַעַן יֵאָרִיךְ יָמָיו עַל־
מַמְלָכְתּוֹ הוּא וּבָנָיו בְּקֶרֶב יִשְׂרָאֵל:

If, after you have entered the land that the Eternal One your God has assigned to you, and taken possession of it and settled in it, you decide, “I will set a king over me, as do all the nations about me,” you shall be free to set a king over yourself, one chosen by the Eternal One your God. Be sure to set as king over yourself one of your own people; you must not set a foreigner over you, one who is not your kinsman. Moreover, he shall not keep many horses or send people back to Egypt to add to his horses, since the Eternal One has warned you: “You must not go back that way again.” And he shall not have many wives, lest his heart go astray; nor shall he amass silver and gold to excess. When he is seated on his royal throne, he shall have a copy of this Teaching written for him on a scroll by the priests. Let it remain with him and let him read in it all his life, so that he may learn to revere the Eternal One his God, to observe faithfully every word of this Teaching as well as these laws. Thus he will not act haughtily toward his fellows or deviate from this law, to the right or to the left, to the end that he and his descendants may reign long in the midst of Israel.

ⁱ NJPS translation, adjusted for gender neutrality

1 Samuel 8ⁱⁱ

וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר זָקֵן שָׁמוּאֵל וַיֵּשֶׁם אֶת-בָּנָיו
שֹׁפְטִים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל: וְלֹא-הָלְכוּ בְּנֵיו בְּדַרְכּוֹ
וַיִּטּוּ אַחֲרֵי הַבָּצַע וַיִּקְחוּ-שֹׁחַד וַיִּטּוּ
מִשְׁפָּט: וַיִּתְּקְבְּצוּ כָל זִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיָּבֹאוּ
אֶל-שָׁמוּאֵל הַרְמָתָה: וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו הִנֵּה
אַתָּה זָקֵנָת וּבָנֶיךָ לֹא הָלְכוּ בְּדַרְכֶּיךָ עִתָּה
שִׁימָה-לָנוּ מֶלֶךְ לְשֹׁפְטֵנוּ כְּכָל-הַגּוֹיִם: וַיֹּרַע
הַדָּבָר בְּעֵינָיו שָׁמוּאֵל כַּאֲשֶׁר אָמְרוּ תִּנָּה-
לָנוּ מֶלֶךְ לְשֹׁפְטֵנוּ וַיִּתְּפֹלֵל שָׁמוּאֵל אֶל-
יְהוָה: וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-שָׁמוּאֵל שְׁמַע
בְּקוֹל הָעָם לְכָל אֲשֶׁר-יֹאמְרוּ אֵלֶיךָ כִּי לֹא
אַתָּה מֵאֲסוּ כִּי-אֲתִי מֵאֲסוּ מִמֶּלֶךְ עֲלֵיהֶם:
כְּכָל-הַמַּעֲשִׂים אֲשֶׁר-עָשׂוּ מִיּוֹם הָעֲלֵיתִי
אוֹתָם מִמִּצְרַיִם וְעַד-הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה וַיַּעֲזֹבֵנִי
וַיַּעֲבְדוּ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים כִּן הָמָּה עֹשִׂים גַּם-
לָּךְ: וְעַתָּה שְׁמַע בְּקוֹלָם אֲךָ כִּי-הָעַד תָּעִיד
בָּהֶם וְהִגַּדְתָּ לָּהֶם מִשְׁפַּט הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר
יִמְלֹךְ עֲלֵיהֶם: וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁמוּאֵל אֵת כָּל-
דְּבָרֵי יְהוָה אֶל-הָעָם הַשְׂאֵלִים מֵאִתּוֹ
מֶלֶךְ: וַיֹּאמֶר זֶה יְהִי מִשְׁפַּט הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר
יִמְלֹךְ עֲלֵיכֶם אֶת-בְּנֵיכֶם יִקַּח וְשָׂם לוֹ
בְּמִרְכָּבָתוֹ וּבְפָרָשָׁיו וְרָצוּ לִפְנֵי מִרְכָּבָתוֹ:

When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons judges over Israel. But his sons did not follow in his ways; they were bent on gain, they accepted bribes, and they subverted justice. All the elders of Israel assembled and came to Samuel at Ramah, and they said to him: “You have grown old, and your sons have not followed your ways. Therefore appoint a king for us, to govern us like all other nations.”

Samuel was displeased that they said: “Give us a king to govern us.” Samuel prayed to the Eternal One, and God replied to Samuel: “Heed the demand of the people in everything they say to you. For it is not you that they have rejected; it is Me they have rejected as their King. Like everything else they have done ever since I brought them out of Egypt to this day – forsaking Me and worshiping other gods – so they are doing to you. Heed their demand; but warn them solemnly, and tell them about the practices of any king who will rule over them.”

Samuel reported all the words of the Eternal One to the people, who were asking him for a king. He said: “This will be the practice of the king who will rule over you: He will take your sons and appoint them as his charioteers and horsemen, and they will serve as outrunners for his chariots. He will appoint

ⁱⁱ NJPS translation, adjusted for gender neutrality

וְלָשׁוֹם לוֹ שָׂרֵי אֲלָפִים וְשָׂרֵי חֲמִשִּׁים
וְלַחְרֹשׁ חֲרִישׁוֹ וְלִקְצֹר קְצִירוֹ וְלַעֲשׂוֹת
כְּלֵי־מִלְחָמָתוֹ וְכָלִי רֶכֶב׃ וְאֶת־בָּנוֹתֵיכֶם
יִקַּח לְרִקְחוֹת וְלִטְבָּחוֹת וְלֵאֲפוֹת׃ וְאֶת־
שְׂדוֹתֵיכֶם וְאֶת־כַּרְמֵיכֶם וְזִיתֵיכֶם הַטּוֹבִים
יִקַּח וְנָתַן לַעֲבָדָיו׃ וְזֹרְעֵיכֶם וְכַרְמֵיכֶם
יַעֲשֶׂה וְנָתַן לְסָרִיסָיו וְלַעֲבָדָיו׃ וְאֶת־
עֲבָדֵיכֶם וְאֶת־שִׁפְחוֹתֵיכֶם וְאֶת־בַּחֲוָרֵיכֶם
הַטּוֹבִים וְאֶת־חֲמֹמְרֵיכֶם יִקַּח וַעֲשֶׂה
לְמַלְאָכָתּוֹ׃ צֹאנֵכֶם יַעֲשֶׂה וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ־לוֹ
לַעֲבָדִים׃ וְזַעֲקֶתֶם בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא מִלִּפְנֵי
מַלְכְּכֶם אֲשֶׁר בָּחַרְתֶּם לָכֶם וְלֹא־יַעֲנֶה
יְהוָה אֶתְכֶם בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא׃ וַיִּמָּאֲנוּ הָעָם
לִשְׁמֹעַ בְּקוֹל שְׁמוּאֵל וַיֹּאמְרוּ לֹא כִּי אִם־
מֶלֶךְ יִהְיֶה עָלֵינוּ׃ וְהָיִינוּ גַם־אֲנַחְנוּ כְּכָל־
הַגּוֹיִם וְשִׁפְטָנוּ מִלִּכְנוּ וַיֵּצֵא לִפְנֵינוּ וְנִלְחַם
אֶת־מִלְחַמָּתָנוּ׃ וַיִּשְׁמַע שְׁמוּאֵל אֶת כָּל־
דְּבָרֵי הָעָם וַיַּדְבֵּר בְּאָזְנֵי יְהוָה׃ וַיֹּאמֶר
יְהוָה אֶל־שְׁמוּאֵל שְׁמַע בְּקוֹלָם וְהַמְלִכְתָּ
לָהֶם מֶלֶךְ וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל אֶל־אֲנָשֵׁי
יִשְׂרָאֵל לָכֵן אִישׁ לְעִירוֹ׃

them as his chiefs of thousands and of fifties; or they will have to plough his fields, reap his harvest, and make his weapons and the equipment for his chariots. He will take your daughters as perfumers, cooks, and bakers. He will seize your choice fields, vineyards, and olive groves, and give them to his courtiers. He will take a tenth part of your grain and vintage and give it to his eunuchs and courtiers. He will take your male and female slaves, your choice young men and your asses, and put them to work for him. He will take a tenth part of your flocks, and you shall become his slaves. The day will come when you cry out because of the king whom you yourselves have chosen; and God will not answer you on that day.”

But the people would not listen to Samuel’s warning. “No,” they said, “we must have a king over us, that we may be like all the other nations. Let our king rule over us and go out at our head and fight our battles.”

When Samuel heard all that the people said, he reported it to the Eternal. And God said to Samuel: “Heed their demands and appoint a king for them.” Samuel then said to the men of Israel, “All of you go home.”

KINGLY ROLES

Prof Nili Wazanaⁱⁱⁱ

The law of the king disempowers the institution of monarchy. It is unique, unparalleled in other biblical law corpora or in ancient Near Eastern law codes. The writers of the anti-monarchical passages themselves are aware of the uniqueness of their position, severing the common link between Divine and human rule. The people's will to appoint a king is portrayed as the outcome of their longing to be 'like all other nations'. The law of the king is, however, not a total rejection of kingship. God adheres to the people's wish to appoint a human king over them, yet restricts the powerful position. The law is not, though, targeting local kingship, but the building of an empire. The three excesses prohibited by Deuteronomy are integral to ancient empires, and may even be considered as prerequisites for establishing one.

Ha-Amek Davar to Deuteronomy 17:14

אין זה מצוה במוחלט למנות מלך אלא
רשות ... יש מדינה שאינה יכולה
לסבול דעת מלוכה. ויש מדינה שבלא
מלך הרי היא כספינה בלי קברניט.
ודבר זה א"א לעשות עפ"י הכרח מ"ע.

It is not an absolute requirement to appoint a king; rather, the Torah gives a permission. There are states which could not cope with a monarchy; and there are states which, if there was no king, would be like a ship without a captain. A matter such as this cannot be decided by the Torah with a binding commandment.

ⁱⁱⁱ Nili Wazana, "The law of the king (Deuteronomy 17:14–20) in the light of empire and destruction" in Peter Dubovský, Dominik Markl and Jean-Pierre Sonnet (eds), *The Fall of Jerusalem and the Rise of the Torah* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 169-194: 176, 184.

KINGLY DEMOCRACY

Mishpat Kohen 144

בזמן שאין מלך, כיון שמשפטי המלוכה הם ג"כ
מה שנוגע למצב הכללי של האומה, חוזרים
אלה הזכויות של המשפטים ליד האומה בכללה.

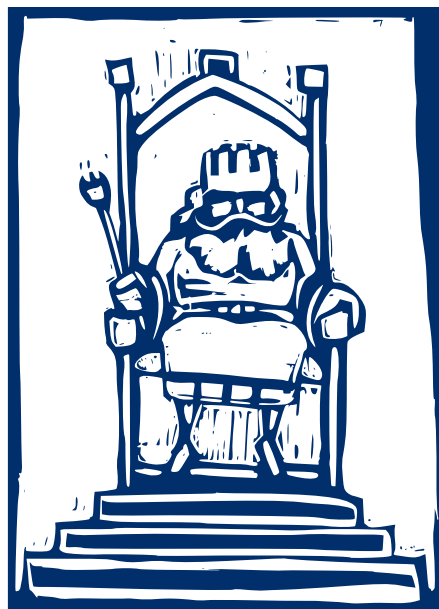
Because the kingly laws cover the overall governance of
the nation, at a time when there is no king, all royal
powers revert to the nation as a whole.

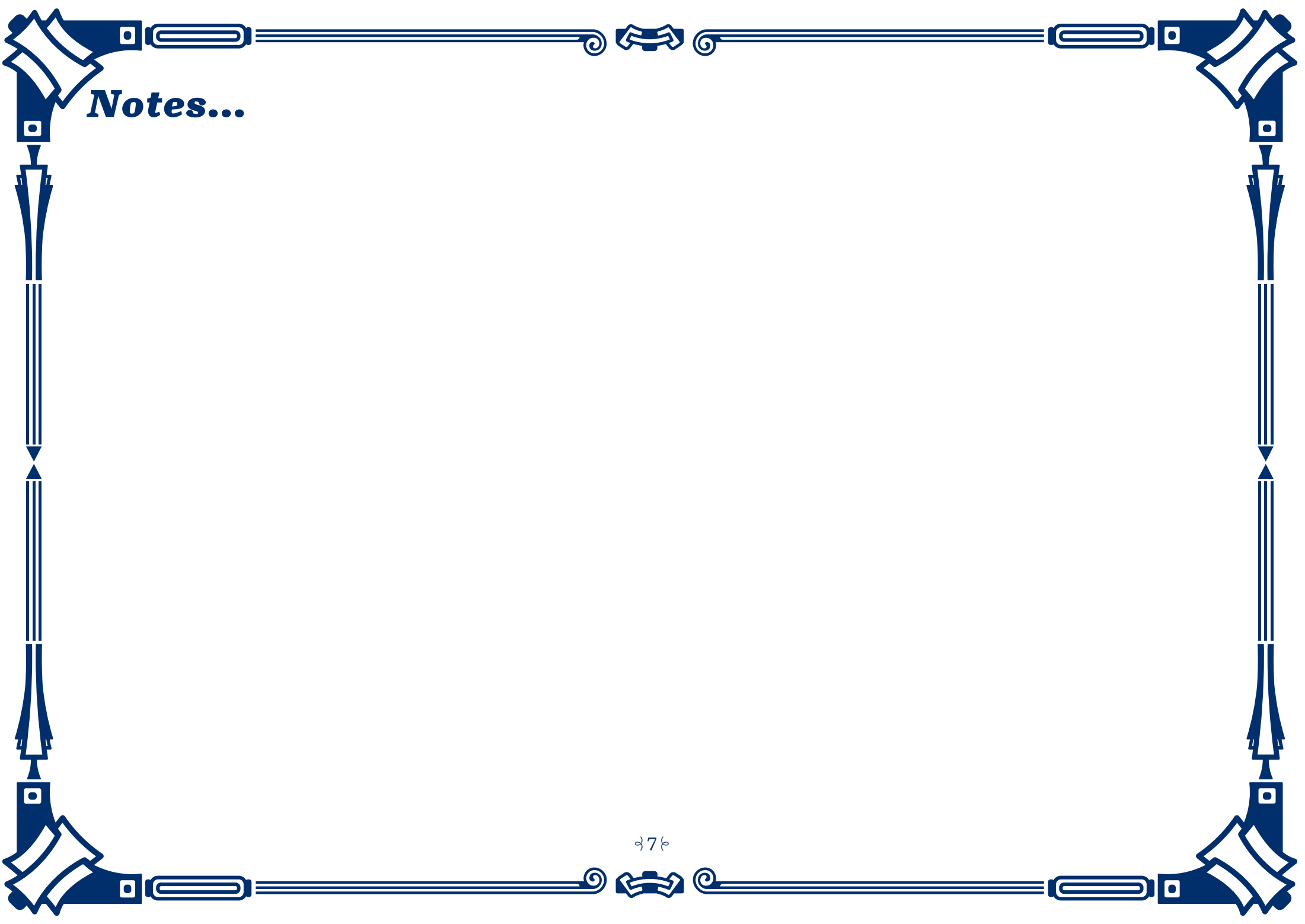
KINGLY VALUES

b.Horayot 10a-b

כמדומין אתם ששררה אני נותן לכם עבדות אני
נותן לכם.

Do you imagine that it is power I am granting you? It is
servitude I am granting you!





Notes...